

SUPERSTITION

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Even in these days of complicated machinery, super-microscopes and atom-smashers the stigma of superstition clings to the mind of mankind. However, modern civilization has managed to abolish all but a few of the many thousands of superstitions once prevalent in the world. The origins of superstition can be found in early man's effort to explain nature and those things which he could not understand. By these superstitions man attempted to avoid bad luck, invite good luck, and predict the future. In the more advanced of the ancient civilizations the crude system of superstition gave way to the more attractive mythology but the motivating power was still the same.

The fundamental basis of all superstition may be attributed to two of man's weaknesses, ignorance and fear. Ignorance exists in many forms and one of them is the misinterpretation of facts, leading to the formulation of ridiculous superstitions. Whenever some occurrence took place which man could not explain he would attribute it to the doings of the spirits, early man attributed a living spirit to everything, and any simultaneous occurring event was thought the "omen" indicating the event was to take place. Even today many people refer to certain events as good or bad omens. Almost everyone has some sort of pet superstition no matter how intelligent he may be, for instance, John D. Rockefeller always carried an eagle stone in his pocket with a ribbon

passed through the center of the stone as a charm against disaster, shipwreck, and other calamities. The ribbon is said to possess even more virtues than the stone itself, and when Mr. Rockefeller wished to confer a particular favor upon someone, he gave him a small piece of this ribbon.

Fear may exist in several forms but it is the irrational fear which forms the bogey of superstition. Many of nature's common phenomenon such as tornadoes and earthquakes which even today strike terror into the hearts of all but the strongest men, played havoc with early man's unrestrained imagination and led to the invention of all sorts of distorted ideas about the spirits behind these phenomenon. Lightning, thunder, floods, and volcanoes were to him supernatural forces that were always striking terror into his heart instead of just natural forces that could be easily explained.

Many superstitions which exist today are merely modifications of the superstitions that were originated many years ago. A few of the more common ones will be briefly traced back to their origins.

Many people today believe that to break a mirror signifies seven years bad luck. The origin of this superstition is very simple. Looking-glasses were regarded as implements of divination and to break one was disastrous, because it was the destruction of a means of knowing the will of the gods. The ancient Greeks used to dip a mirror into water when they desired to know what was to become of a sick man; as his future condition was dependent upon

whether his reflection in the looking-glass looked well or ill. Today a broken mirror is still regarded as unfortunate.

Pure black cats have been regarded as good omens ever since the days of ancient Egypt. They were regarded with great reverence by the Egyptians and were often buried in the same tombs as their worshippers. Black cats have always been associated with witches, devils, and other evil beings as companions in darkness and evil. Even today some people are superstitious about crossing the path taken by a black cat. No real reasons have ever been found to explain why black cats are considered good luck.

Palmistry dates back to ancient China and Egypt; nobody knows when it began as it has been handed down from generation to generation. It is merely an attempt to predict the future by the length and shape of the lines on a person's hand. Palmistry was introduced in England by the gipsies in the 16th century and was later spread into the New World by the gipsies. People still like to have their palms read today even though laws have been made to suppress and abolish fortune-telling of all types.

There are many other superstitions existing today such as lucky numbers, lucky days, vampires, crystal-gazing, etc, but they are slowly disappearing. Some people are naturally superstitious no matter how well they are educated, while others are raised in an atmosphere of superstition which remains with them when they grow up.

It is not an easy matter to prove superstitions false as they are often on subjects about which little is known and only by carefull investigation and common sense reasoning can we hope to dislodge false superstitions from the minds of the people.